

National Constitution Center

The **National Constitution Center** is a nonprofit, nonpartisan institution devoted to the United States Constitution. On Independence Mall in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the center is an interactive museum and a national town hall for constitutional dialogue, hosting government leaders, journalists, scholars, and celebrities for public discussions (including presidential debates). The center offers civic learning resources onsite and online. It does not house the original Constitution, which is stored at the National Archives Building in Washington, D.C.

The groundbreaking ceremony (attended by President Bill Clinton)^[1] was held on September 17, 2000, the 213th anniversary of the signing of the Constitution. The center opened on July 4, 2003,^[2] joining other historic sites and attractions in what has been called "America's most historic square mile"^[3] because of its proximity to Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell.

National Constitution Center



Exterior of the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



Location within Pennsylvania

Established	17 September 2000
Location	Independence Mall, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Coordinates	39.953406°N 75.148952°W﻿ / ﻿39.953406°N 75.148952°W﻿ / 39.953406; -75.148952
Type	History museum
Visitors	817,000 (2011)
Director	Jeffrey Rosen
Public transit access	<div><div><div><div><div></div><div>5th Street:</div></div><div><div></div><div>Market–Frankford Line</div></div></div><div><div></div><div>SEPTA bus: 38, 44, 48</div></div><div><div></div><div>Philly PHLASH</div></div></div></div>
Website	constitutioncenter.org (http s://constitutioncenter.org/)

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Background

The center was created by the Constitution Heritage Act.^[4] Approved on September 16, 1988 and signed by President Ronald Reagan,^[5] the act defined the National Constitution Center as "within or in close proximity to the Independence National Historical Park. The Center shall disseminate information about the United States Constitution on a non-partisan basis in order to increase the awareness and understanding of the Constitution among the American people."^[6] The center is at 525 Arch Street, an address chosen because May 25 (5/25) was the date that the Constitutional Convention began in Philadelphia.



"We the People" inscription at the National Constitution Center

The architectural firm of Pei Cobb Freed & Partners designed the center,^[7] and Leslie E. Robertson Associates were the structural engineers for the project. Witold Rybczynski of *The New York Times* wrote, "Quiet but assertive, respectful of its surroundings, considerate of its public, this building is destined to take its place among the nation's leading public monuments."^[8]

Ralph Appelbaum Associates designed the center's visitor experience and exhibition hall. The public space is 160,000 square feet (15,000 m²), including galleries. The center has 75,785 square feet (7,040.7 m²) of exhibit space. The center is made of American products, including 85,000 square feet (7,900 m²) of Indiana limestone, 2.6 million pounds

of steel, and a half-million cubic feet of concrete. Construction of the center was overseen by project manager Hill International.

Leadership

The National Constitution Center board of trustees appointed law professor, legal commentator, and former visiting scholar Jeffrey Rosen to serve as president and chief executive officer of the center; Rosen began his tenure in June 2013.^[9] The chairmen of the board of the Center have been:

<u>John C. Bogle</u>	1999–2007
<u>George H. W. Bush</u>	2007–2009
<u>Bill Clinton</u>	2009–2012
<u>Jeb Bush</u>	2013–2017
<u>Joe Biden</u>	2017–2019
<u>Neil Gorsuch</u>	2019–

Civic education

Originally through its Annenberg Center for Education and Outreach, the center offers onsite and online civic-education programs and a study center which develops and distributes teaching tools, lesson plans and resources.^[10]

Public engagement

The center has hosted several debates, including a 2008 Democratic presidential primary debate between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama^[11] a town hall meeting with Senator John McCain,^[12] and a 2006 Pennsylvania Senatorial debate between Republican incumbent Rick Santorum and Democratic challenger Bob Casey.^[13]

Liberty Medal

In 2006 the center became home to the Liberty Medal, an annual award established in 1988 to recognize "men and women of courage and conviction who strive to secure the blessings of liberty to people around the globe."^[14]

Reception

George Will wrote for *The Washington Post*, "At the other end of the mall sparkles a modernist jewel of America's civic life, the National Constitution Center".^[15] Jason DeParle wrote for *The New York Times* Learning Network, "Since opening in 2003, [the National Constitution Center] has put forward a vision of constitutional history both left and right have embraced."^[16] According to *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, "The National Constitution Center has established itself as one of the city's cultural celebs, attracting a million visitors a year, putting pizzazz into civic and educational offerings, hosting blockbuster exhibitions, and attracting the nation's intellectual cognoscenti and media elite like bears to honey."^[17]

Gallery



State flags in the lobby



Exhibits



Life-sized statues of the signers of the Constitution in Signers' Hall

See also

- [Philadelphia Liberty Medal](#) – An annual award administered by the Center
- [Constitution Day \(United States\)](#)
- [Independence National Historical Park](#)
- [Landmark Cases \(TV series\)](#)

References

1. "The Constitutional Walking Tour of Philadelphia" (<http://www.theconstitutional.com/about/about-enable.html>). Retrieved 27 March 2013.
2. "TRAVEL ADVISORY; Constitution Center To Open in Philadelphia – New York Times" (<https://www.nytimes.com/2003/06/22/travel/travel-advisory-constitution-center-to-open-in-philadelphia.html>). *The New York Times*. 22 June 2003. Retrieved 28 March 2013.
3. "Independence Visitor Center" (<http://phlvisitorcenter.com/attraction/independence-visitor-center>). *Independence Visitor Center*. Retrieved 9 August 2013.
4. "The Constitutional Walking Tour of Philadelphia" (<http://www.theconstitutional.com/about/about-enable.html>). Retrieved 28 March 2013.
5. "Untitled Document" (<https://web.archive.org/web/20121128184221/http://www.brynmawr.edu/iconog/uphp/indnoll2/linked%20pages/INHP%20HISTORY.htm>). Archived from the original (<http://www.brynmawr.edu/iconog/uphp/indnoll2/linked%20pages/INHP%20HISTORY.htm>) on 2012-11-28. Retrieved 28 March 2013.
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7. "Pei Cobb Freed & Partners" (<http://www.pcf-p.com/a/p/9810/r0.html>). Retrieved 28 March 2013.
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12. "McCain's town-hall meeting at Constitution Center 6abc.com" (<http://abclocal.go.com/wpvi/story?section=news/politics&id=6199863>). Retrieved 28 March 2013.
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14. "THE LIBERTY MEDAL" (<http://constitutioncenter.org/libertymedal/about.html>). Retrieved 28 March 2013.
15. "George F. Will – Sense From the Hall of Framers" (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/08/12/AR2005081201409.html>). *The Washington Post*. 14 August 2005. Retrieved 28 March 2013.
16. "Constitutional Lessons, Old and New, on Display" (https://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/featured_articles/20050912monday.html). *The New York Times*. Retrieved 28 March 2013.
17. "Philadelphia does history right So far, so good for the National Constitution Center. - Philly.com" (http://articles.philly.com/2006-06-13/news/25402331_1_national-constitution-center-joseph-torsellaconstitutional-issues). Retrieved 28 March 2013.

External links

- [Official website \(https://constitutioncenter.org/\)](https://constitutioncenter.org/) 

- [Peter Jennings Project for Journalists and the Constitution \(https://web.archive.org/web/20070525222134/http://www.constitutioncenter.org/jennings/\)](https://web.archive.org/web/20070525222134/http://www.constitutioncenter.org/jennings/)
 - [Podcast interview with Eli Lesser – Director of Education for the National Constitution Center from the Speaking of History podcast, July 2007 \(http://speakingofhistory.blogspot.com/2007/07/podcast-109-interview-with-eli-lesser.html\)](http://speakingofhistory.blogspot.com/2007/07/podcast-109-interview-with-eli-lesser.html)
 - [Constitution Daily blog of the National Constitution Center \(http://blog.constitutioncenter.org/\)](http://blog.constitutioncenter.org/)
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